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ETAIN THE BELOVED
AND OTHER POEMS





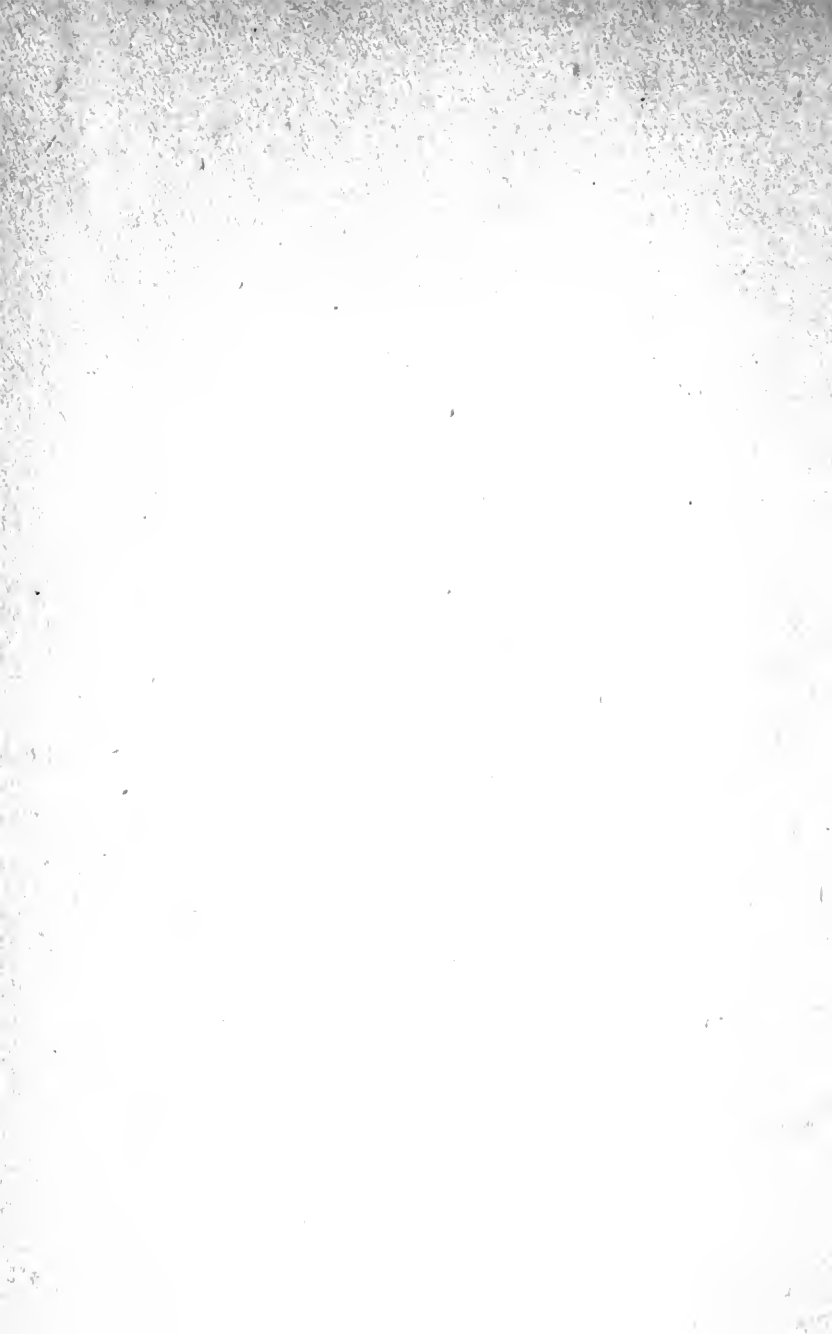
JAMES H. COUSINS

From a pencil sketch by Florence Gillespie

ETAIN THE BELOVED
AND OTHER POEMS
BY JAMES H. COUSINS

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ETAIN THE BELOVED

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TO PENROSE MORRIS

ETAIN THE BELOVED

I

Strong in the strength that finds in gentleness
A way to peace, King Eochaidh on the throne
Of Erin sits. Around his footstool press
Clansmen and chiefs. Some wind of thought has blown
Their eyes to flame. Some purpose, in the stress
Of travailing tongues, to birth finds not a way :
What all would utter, none has wit to say.

Into their midst one came, an agéd bard
Upon whose flowing hair Wisdom had laid
Her gift of silver. On those faces, scarred
From old forgotten fights, he looked, and weighed
The meaning in their eyes, though sorely marred ;
And from the tangled fibre of their thought
Into the web of speech their purpose wrought.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

“ Thy word, O King, has passed by hill and dale
Throughout all Erin, bidding to the Feast
Of Tara all thy people, with the tale
Of tribute due from greatest and from least.
Nor should this word than others less prevail,
But that the herald-spear thy will hath sent,
Against the shield of custom has been bent.

‘ Thou knowest, O King, that from most ancient years
No chieftain wifeless rules for thee the land,
Nor mateless at a festival appears ;
But fixed in all experience doth stand :
And thus, made master of all human fears,
Fears not, but strongly round the camp-fires goes,
Full sharer of thy people's joys and woes.

“ Equal in yoke and honour, as the day
And night, that are but breathings of the soul,
They on life's crooked journey take their way
Diverse in gift, in essence one and whole.
This is the custom, King ! Yet custom may,
If but of man, be as a smith who twists
An iron chain to bind upon his wrists.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

“ But custom may, if fashioned to the Law
That made the world, be as the straitened string
From which the Master of the Feast may draw
Majestic speech, a living, wondrous thing
To rid the brow of pale contention’s flaw,
And passing like the honey-cup along,
Gather their wandering lips to one great song.

“ And such the custom that thy people plead :
For when of old the deathless Lord of Life
Dagda came forth, and knew the immortal need
That burned within his heart, he took to wife
Dana the Mother of all human seed.
In her his breath found music and a name.
In her his fire has blossomed into flame.

“ Throughout the world that fire and music run
One sings within the maiden’s wondering heart :
One stirs the veins of manhood, as the sun
Sets the spring’s fingers thrilling with the smart
Of keen, ecstatic life that’s but begun.
In every seed that breaks and wind that blows,
Each in the other seeks and finds repose.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

“ Wherefore, O King, since thou art yet unwed,
And thus in kingship standest incomplete,
Unfurnished in thy heart, from whence are fed
The streams of power and wisdom, it is not meet
That unto thee thy people bow the head,
And here thy sovereignty with tribute own
Till thou hast set a Queen upon thy throne.”

He ceased, and all the faces of the crowd
Shone with the light that kindles when the boon
Of speech has eased the heart ; as when a cloud
Falls from the labouring shoulder of the moon,
And all the world stands smiling silver-browed.
King Eochaidh for a moment bent his head
In thought ; then smiling he arose and said :

“ I am not careless of the ancient need
That moves your minds. Within my own it moves
Like a long-hidden, unforgotten seed
The spring has touched uneasily : like hooves
Long captive, when the trumpet has decreed
A royal pilgrimage, and in the liss
They dance to taste the highway’s ringing bliss.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

“ So have I watched for that sure sign that fills
The horn of fate, that bending this our realm
Unto the Will that works behind our wills,
It may remain ; as when storms overwhelm,
And leafy spray whirls over the roaring hills,
The swaying pine bends as the storm wars by,
And lives to shake proud arms against the sky

“ But now the horn is full, the hour is here.
Our wills as one move onward to their end.
Here now I lift on high the royal spear,
And thus through Erin proclamation send :
‘ Search for the promised maiden far and near
Whom the high Gods have destined at my side
To reign.’ Go forth. The King awaits his bride.

“ She shall be found in some most quiet place
Where Beauty sits all day beside her knee
And looks with happy envy on her face ;
Where Virtue blushes, her own guilt to see,
And Grace learns new, sweet meanings from her grace ;
Where all that ever was or will be wise
Pales at the burning wisdom of her eyes.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

“When you at last, far off like worshippers
Within some holy circle, bow your heads,
You shall await till on that face of her’s
A smile like spring’s first morning slowly spreads ;
And when her lip with wondrous music stirs,
Bear hither like the wind her deathless name,
That I may light my heart at its white flame.”

Scarce had he ceased when from the royal tent
Broke the full tide of their loud ecstasy,
And through the woods like summer thunder went,
Full of great rumour of mighty things to be
That died far off like twilight breezes spent.
Then sang the bard in hidden wisdom skilled :
“Thus is the purpose of the Gods fulfilled.

*“Lift now the hands that may not bless
A wifeless feast, a queenless throne,
A court or council womanless,
Or life one-limbed and sideways grown,
That holds the hands that may not bless.*

ETAIN THE BELOVED

*"The starry Virgin of the east
Steps up the sky to lead the sign
Where most has kissed and mixed with least,
And one-in-twain life's torches shine
Behind the Virgin of the east.*

*"Then lift the hands that gladly bless
Full life, to life's great fulness grown,
A power to stand through shock and stress,
And rear an everlasting throne
Held high on hands that gladly bless."*

Then on a night when on his hearth the gleam
Of crackling faggots flung a wavering glow
Along his red-yew roof from beam to beam
Like glancing eyes, King Eochaidh to and fro
Turned on his couch, dreaming a happy dream
Of snapping stems, and crisp leaves crushed by feet
With high desire made musical and fleet.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

Out of the fire a swift and slender shaft
Of yellow flame pierced through the King's dropped lids,
And woke a murmur of bees whose eager craft
Rifled the treasures of blossomy pyramids ;
Whereat the King, raising his hand, low laughed,
Then passed like some worn swimmer on the sweep
Of strong waves toward the unfathomed gulf of sleep.

At length in that white hour when dewy wings
Stir with new day's delight, there came a sound
As though a passion of voices and smitten strings
Mingled and swelled and flew along the ground,
Till at the utmost of its triumphings,
Through the King's sleep and on his door the dawn
Broke, and a mighty shout : " Etain ! Etain ! "

ETAIN THE BELOVED

II

Thereafter, on a morning rich with spring,
When round his feet new-opened flowers looked up
Wide-eyed and wet at some most wondrous thing,
And crystal draughts from many an odorous cup
Were spilled by winds in playful rioting,
King Eochaidh stood beside a quiet shore,
Dumb with a joy he never knew before.

From league to league alone his path had lain
On windy hills, through forests dark, or deep
In dank, sonorous glens. Through every vein
A burning joy had drunk the mists of sleep,
And sung "Etain, Etain," till the refrain
Irked, and he slept, and when he sprang awake
Saw that which made his heart with rapture shake.

There by the sea, Etain his destined bride
Sat unabashed, unwitting of the sight
Of him who gazed upon her gleaming side,
Fair as the snowfall of a single night;
Her arms like foam upon the flowing tide;
Her curd-white limbs in all their beauty bare,
Straight as the rule of Dagda's carpenter.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

Her cheeks were like the foxglove when it glows
At noon: her eyes blue as the hyacinth.
Like moonlight struck to marble, nobly rose
Her neck upon her shoulder's polished plinth;
And like the light that swiftly comes and goes
Through breaking waves, among her hair her hands
Broke into wavy gold its plaited strands.

Then came her maidens, bright and blossoming
With beauty, and before her beauty bowed,
And stood around her in a laughing ring
To robe her starry splendour like a cloud.
And as her hair they twined, the hidden king
Scarce knew if on her lips, that knew no wrong,
Or in his own hushed heart he heard this song.

*The king comes riding from the north,
From battles won, with marching men.
Ah, whose white eager arms go forth
To bid him welcome home again
When he comes riding from the north?*

ETAIN THE BELOVED

*The king comes riding from the south,
And halts beside the royal liss.
Ah, whose the happy smiling mouth
That gives and takes a long warm kiss
When he comes riding from the south ?*

*The king comes riding from the east.
O night how dark ! O way how long !
Ah, whose dear eyes shall light the feast ?
Ah, who shall lift his heart with song
When he comes riding from the east ?*

*The king comes riding from the west,
And smiles unto himself, and sighs.
Ah, whose the white and easeful breast
Where he shall close his kingly eyes
When he comes riding from the west ?*

ETAIN THE BELOVED

Small wonder now that Eochaidh's leaping heart
Strained like a hound in leash: yet through his bliss
There passed a thin cold blade with sudden smart
Of doubt that he but dreamed, of dread that this
Was but a vision that would soon depart:
But when the song had ceased, there stood the maid
Flushed with keen joy, and like a queen arrayed.

A mantle of bright purple, waving, wound
Her form, and from her shoulders white as milk
Fell in reluctant folds and touched the ground.
Upon her breast the flash of emerald silk—
As though the glory of earth had wrapped her round—
Mixed with the glow of red embroidered gold
That seemed with light her body to enfold.

A sudden breeze came singing from the sea
And broke with sunlight through the leafy shade.
Then came King Eochaidh forth, and on his knee
Bent low before the silent, trembling maid.
"The king," he said, "has come, and kneels to thee,
Foredoomed to share the burden of his throne,
And glorify its glory with thine own."

ETAIN THE BELOVED

Then through her frame a gentle tremor went
And lit her face with exquisite swift fire
That woke forgotten dreams, whose shaken scent
Sweetened the quiet winds of her desire
With some divine, unuttered ravishment,
Some earnest of great doom that filled her heart
With sorrow, joy's majestic counterpart.

Upon his head she gently laid her hand,
And said, "Arise! To thee my heart has bowed
When minstrel after minstrel, tired and tanned,
Has supped beside our hearth, and sung the proud
High song that bears thy greatness through the land.
For thee from life's clear dawn my love remained
Fixed, and at length to thee I have attained."

ETAIN THE BELOVED

III

Across the woods of Meath the bird of day
Fell from the boughs of noon with bleeding wing,
While dark-browed Balor strode the eastern way,
And scattered darkness from his cloudy sling,
Till at his feet the hosts of Erin lay
Smitten with sleep; then round their dreams he cast
The chains wherewith he binds his prisoners fast.

From dawn till dark, in many a hero-game
Glad eyes had flashed, or bent in pride august
To hear the chant of some undying name
Whose deeds were strong as wine. Anon the dust
Of festive feet stormed in a wild acclaim
Around the royal place where, side by side,
Sat Eochaidh and Etain his new-made bride.

Now ancient Sleep, with Silence for his queen,
Reigns o'er those palaces of stately fir
That drowse in curtained moonlight's misty sheen.
Within, the arras hardly seems to stir
Its languorous folds of purple, blue and green,
Whose colours part or mix, as rise and fall
The pine fire's odorous gleams on roof and wall.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

No sound, no life, save where with soft salute
The wide-eyed sentinels a moment wait
And listen sidelong to the passing bruit
Of ghostly winds, that murmur at their state
And pass, with peevish cry and soundless foot,
Where the dead fly upon the waveless moat
Makes of the dead dropped leaf a funeral boat.

Yet in the midst of silence so profound,
One stirred his rushy couch as though in pain,
For through his dreams a torrent of swift sound
Stumbled in foam about his echoing brain,
And all his thought in loud confusion drowned
And bore him toward a dim and perilous steep
That flung its shadow on a writhing deep.

Then like the sun obscured by valley smoke,
With some vague trouble glooming in his eye,
Ailill the brother of the king awoke
And scanned the portents of the morning sky,
Till on his mind a mellowing radiance broke,
And in his heart there dawned a wondrous face
That lit his world with Love's exalted grace.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

Often in dreams a shadow by his side
Had sung of one who came in some great hour
With Love—and woe. Now came his brother's bride;
And when he bent before her in her bower,
Within his heart the shadow rose and cried,
And passed away, while all his being shook,
Stricken with joy and sorrow in a look.

Among the clamours of the festal time
His love for ease he hid, again pursued,
Finding a solace in the chanted rhyme
Of agéd bards, or youths in merry mood
Where angry words were counted as a crime;
And fireside friendship staunchéd his hungry sighs
When she no more was banquet for his eyes.

But when the marriage festival was past,
And restless day gave place to torturing night,
His captive passion burst its chains, and cast
Its ardours from his brain in living light;
Then like the thin voice of a spell-raised blast,
A dissonant note from hidden harp-strings drawn
Troubled the dreams of Eochaidh and Etain.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

By day the dream had faded to a mist
In some far-folded valley of the mind ;
But when, heart-charmed in evening's amethyst,
The labouring world grew wonderfully kind,
And upturned lips by brooding love were kissed ;
Like silent rain in summer twilight spilled,
A wandering thought King Eochaidh touched and
 chilled.

Meanwhile with steps that would and would not shun
Bliss craved and spurned ; with tongue that might
 not speak

The pain that some strange sweetness now had won,
Ailill moved to and fro ; and soon his cheek
Paled like the austere Servants of the Sun ;
And day by day his passion's famished flame
Nourished itself upon his wasting frame.

In vain the king's diviners daily strove
To find the spring of Ailill's gathering ill ;
In vain Etain by stream and murmuring grove
Sought for the shadowy hand that held his will ;
And when dark Balor cracked his whip, and drove
His winter herd across the bounds of day,
Ailill upon his couch in weakness lay.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

So when a year had passed, and through the land
The king went forth on royal pilgrimage,
Unto Etain he gave his last command
That she, his brother's sickness to assuage,
Withhold no gift, but give with regal hand;
And should chill death blow out his flickering blaze,
His funeral-stone with honour she should raise.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

IV.

From day to day Etain with eager thought
Outran sick Ailill's fleetest-footed needs;
From sun and wind a subtle medicine caught,
And charmed swift healing from the fresh-strewn reeds
Upon his floor, which her own hands had brought
From ferny hollows, where cool waters laughed
That Ailill from her cup with gladness quaffed.

Yet with each dawn that came with growing power
There grew a cloudy thought in Ailill's mind
That gloomed the joy of health's returning hour,
And put a sigh in evening's gentle wind,
And touched with ill-timed frost life's opening flower,
And turned to poverty the proffered wealth
In hands that wrought his sickness and his health.

And she, in service, found a hidden way
To strange new meanings in the eyes of life;
And reached a joy beyond the shrill affray
Of horns and harps loud with the songs of strife
Or little triumphs of a passing day;
And grasped, in giving, life's most perfect gift—
Love that is raised by that which it doth lift.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

So moved the twain through sunshine barred with
gloom,
Finding in each twin solace and despair :
He, like a frail and gently tended bloom,
Grudged each day's health that took him past her care ;
And she, o'ershadowed by approaching doom,
Watching his need of her grow less and less,
Sickened with grief her lips dare not express.

Tossed thus on hidden billows of the soul,
And swept by winds that warred against the will,
They drained the little draught in life's poor bowl,
And all unwitting wrought each other ill ;
Until at last, stung past the heart's control,
Marking Etain's white brow and pensive eye,
Thus Ailill broke the silence with a cry.

“ O bitter joy ! O sorrow passing sweet !
O blossoming life that leads to love's pale death !
O gain that speeds to loss on laggard feet !
O living voice that kills the word it saith !
O cooling touch that kindles quenchless heat !
How shall I all my heart's dear burden speak,
Or how keep silence at thy paling cheek ?

ETAIN THE BELOVED

“ I love thee, Queen Etain, but in such wise
As never man loved woman heretofore :
Not with the love that lives upon her eyes,
And counts her breast the summit and the shore
Of all desire, and with tempestuous sighs
Flings to the winds the spoils of reason's thrift
In barter for her body's utmost gift.

“ My love, O queen, is that serener kind
Whose word outruns the lumbering wain of speech,
And springs in light from mind to answering mind ;
And takes its bliss beyond the body's reach,
Thought mixed with thought, as sunlight with sweet
wind ;
And crowds the ways, where human sorrow pleads,
With generations of exalted deeds.

“ Ah, then take back the life that thou hast spent
In vain, since thou dost slay and heal my heart ;
And let quick death beat down my failing tent,
And its lone habitant be blown apart
Through the wide wastes of night's black firmament,
Where move the Powers in whose dread hands may be
The source and end of dreams and destiny.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

“ There past the chain of hours my faithful ghost
May through thy dreams move silently and dim ;
And needing then the least, may serve thee most ;
Or crying seaward from life’s misty rim,
Call forth thy heart beyond its mortal coast :
Happy if in thy spirit’s wakening sigh
My name one murmured moment live and die.”

Thus Ailill spoke ; and like a summer shower
His eager words, tingling on heart and brain,
Stirred many a leaf to life, and many a flower ;
And sank beneath her spirit’s thirsty plain,
Till hidden springs, touched with a strange new power,
Welled in her eyes with flash of sudden streams
From hills that crowned some far-off world of dreams.

Clear-visioned in her meditative eye
Rolled the great world, and lo ! a silent moth
Shredded its mighty frame, till down the sky
It fluttered like a poor discarded cloth
From some dead face flung out by hands that die ;
And thinned like vapours round the lips of day,
And like a breath passed utterly away.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

And as it passed she knew that nevermore
Life would be life again ; yet in her mind
Lurked the dim fear of one who leaves the shore,
And on the sightless hazard of the wind
Moves into doubt and darkness. O'er and o'er
She turned her thought, till softly on her ear
There broke a song a bard was chanting near.

*Because the strong are fallen low,
Who deems that Strength himself is slain?
Through depth and height his arm shall go,
And he shall rear his house again,
Although the strong are fallen low.*

*Because the living all are dead,
Who deems that Life has found a grave?
Among the stars she lifts her head,
She dances lightly on the wave,
Although the living all are dead.*

ETAIN THE BELOVED

*Because the beautiful has passed,
Was Beauty but a passing word?
Behold, the dust through chaos cast
With lovelier loveliness is stirred,
Although the beautiful has passed.*

*And if earth's lovers love amiss,
Who deems that Love has perished quite?
Lo, cloudy lips the mountains kiss,
And day is bosomed on the night,
Although earth's lovers love amiss.*

Swiftly and silently her thought's faint wing
Sought between wind and wind a certain way;
For one was keen with glad awakening
In perfumed morn of some ecstatic day;
And one was loud with song, and quivering string,
And all life's pageantry and noisy breath
Wherewith men strive to drown the voice of death.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

Then said Etain: "King Eochaidh in his might
Drew me to bonds of happiness; but thou
Art as a voice that calls across the night
To where some dawn blows freshly on the brow,
And love with love moves freely as the light,
Mingling in happy dreams their shadowy wings
Beyond these perishing substantial things.

"Ah, me, the pain in joy, the joy in grief!
Who tells the end when once has moved the foot?
Thy hand is on my life's new-opened leaf:
Who knows the hand may pluck its ripened fruit?
To thee—and past, the journey may be brief.
Yet I the king's behest shall all fulfil—
'Nothing withhold to heal my brother's ill.'

"So in the gaze of dawn and wondering flowers
We shall keep tryst by stream and whispering tree;
Perchance to win from life's controlling powers
The healing of thy heart's infirmity;
Perchance—" "Oh! speed the hazard of those hours,"
He cried, "that blind the flame of low desire
In the white light of Love's transmuting fire."

ETAIN THE BELOVED

V

Hard by the swift-winged star, the moth-like moon
Sheds golden dust on waves of day that ebb
Into the deep beyond life's wan lagoon.
The spider Night now spins his monstrous web,
And spots the dark with many a pale cocoon
Hung in his vaporous cave, whose phantoms creep
In visions round the heavy brain of sleep.

Yet one, among the sleepers, never turns
To ease his shoulder of the weight of night ;
But with the shield of sweet oblivion spurns
Those wandering shafts that tease with sound and sight ;
Till in a quiet, deep as kingly urns
In buried places, Ailill deadly lies,
Blind to the spreading signal of the skies.

Now the thick dark, that pressed Etain's calm face
Like softest wool, thins out, and moves, and lifts ;
And like a memory's vague recovered trace
The silent world, looming through cloudy rifts,
Floats greily on the grey abyss of space,
Then slowly forms, and stands at last in light
Built on the crumbled ruins of the night.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

Soon on a cloud o'erhung with heliotrope
Day's harp is lifted, wire on golden wire;
And now great Dagda's burning fingers grope
From string to string, then reaching high and higher
Unto the utterance of some eager hope,
Break through the vibrant silences, and spring
Into one living voice of leaf and wing.

Somewhere the snipe now taps his tiny drum;
The moth goes fluttering upward from the heath;
And where no lightest foot unmarked may come,
The rabbit, tiptoe, plies his shiny teeth
On luscious herbage; and with strident hum
The yellow bees, blustering from flower to flower,
Scatter from dew-filled cups a sparkling shower.

The meadowsweet shakes out its feathery mass;
And rumorous winds, that stir the silent eaves,
Bearing abroad faint perfumes as they pass,
Thrill with some wondrous tale the fluttering leaves,
And whisper secretly along the grass
Where gossamers, for day's triumphal march,
Hang out from blade to blade their diamond arch.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

Forth came Etain, and with a little cry
Scattered the councils of the feathery brood ;
And faced unblenched the red sun's winkless eye
That hawk-like hung above the quivering wood ;
And passed with stately step and head on high
Toward a secluded place—where one doth wait
Silent and imperturbable as fate.

Sweetly the wizard palms of morning sleek
Her brow with spells ; and when a butterfly
Brushes with soft familiar wing her cheek,
Through the deep woods she hears a ghostly sigh,
As if a hidden god were fain to speak
An ancient ageless love that, fold by fold,
Wraps her with joy in throbbing arms of old.

Now is her sandalled foot upon the edge
Of a loud-leaping stream, that flings its damp
To cool the sorrel shaking on its ledge
Under the squirrel's pine, and in a swamp
Goes dumb among the heron-haunted sedge,
Where the swift kingfisher, a moment seen,
Flashes and fades, a flame of sudden green.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

At length she stands within the appointed place,
Where leafy boughs in odorous dusk are blent.
But wherefore now across her tranced face
Pass the quick fingers of bewilderment,
And doubt on doubt like shadows shadows chase?
Faintly she speaks, "Ailill I came to see:
Who art thou—for thou art yet art not he?"

From her soft eye no loosened glances tell
Desire or dread, to him whose cloudless gaze
Knows from what heights of old her footsteps fell
Out of clear light, into this web of days
And nights and mystery inscrutable,
And marks how in the calm of inner power
She moves unmoved to meet her destined hour.

"Etain," he whispered, and again, "Etain."
Such utter love went throbbing through her name
That nigh beyond her doubt her foot had gone;
Yet stood she wavering like a lonely flame
Outburning night, that feels the shake of dawn;
Then said, "Thy name, that doubt aside he cast?"
"Mider," he answered, "come for thee at last."

ETAIN THE BELOVED

“Mider?” she echoed, “Mider?” and the sound
Smote upon hidden doors, and roused from sleep
Faint eyes that dreamed, vague hands that groped
around

The thought behind her thought, and from the deep
Beneath her thought climbed upward, to the bound
Whose shadowy marge like midnight gloom is cast
Between the passing moment and the past.

Then Mider said, “For no poor worm’s desire,
Nor aught of earth, thou comest, O beloved!
But for another’s good thy thoughts conspire;
And far from self thy feet have hither moved
To the high purpose of the sacred fire
That burns thine upward path through joy and pain,
Through birth, through life, through death, to me again.”

Then asked she all bewildered: “Who art thou
Whose eyes have read my soul?” And answered he,
“Thine am I by the immemorial vow
That made thee mine, beloved! eternally,
When for a bride-price, on thy peerless brow
I set a diadem beyond the worth
Of all the crowns of all the queens of earth.”

ETAIN THE BELOVED

Swiftly her thought divining, "Where, and when,
And wherefore parted, thou, beloved! shalt know.
That land which gleams in the rapt poet's ken,
Set in a sea that has no ebb or flow,
Beyond the spear-cast of the dreams of men,
Is mine, and from all changings far withdrawn
There spreads the realm of Mider—and Etain.

"And there we loved, till that Almighty Power
Who set the heavens wheeling with a nod,
Blew thee, a butterfly, from flower to flower,
Until beyond our realm, a splendid God
Knew thee and cherished in a blossomy bower,
And nightly thy fair form in purple laid,
And at thy side his couch of slumber made.

"But thee again the breath of tempest found,
And swept thee forth, and whirled from field to field,
And dashed thee where a roar of festal sound
Shook brazenly doffed helm and resting shield,
And flung thee in a cup that passed around
To one who drank it deep in bridal mirth—
And thou wert born a daughter of the earth.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

“ From year to year life’s pleasures round thee played,
And fell behind the question of thine eyes
That searched the mysteries of leafy shade,
And the blue heron sailing in the skies
Cutting the silence with the rusty blade
His voice, and sought to spy the subtile might
That killed your gathered iris in a night.

“ Ah, soon I saw sweet longing on thy face,
And love’s compelling poppy on thy mouth,
And watched thee robe thy maiden blossoming grace
And dream a king came riding from the south ;
Yet in thy sigh in Eochaidh’s royal place,
Unseen I saw the waft of hidden wings
Set past these perishing substantial things.

“ For thou wert born for love whose windless sail
Moves on great deeps beyond life’s shallow range.
Love linked in flesh with failing flesh shall fail :
Love knit in thought with changing thought shall
change,
Nor all desire against slow Time prevail ;
For that old worm all dreams shall gnaw and rend,
And love that finds an end—itself shall end.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

“ Oh ! not for thee the little irking chain
That frets the bark on life's expanding bole ;
Nor love that maketh free, though it contain
All earth's white loves and thee supreme and sole
Beloved beneath all heaven ; for who shall gain,
Since between love and love most subtly mixed
Untrodden silence stands forever fixed ?

“ My love would brood upon the holy thing
Within thine inmost being folded far,
Till it at length come forth on perfect wing
To brush with sweet eclipse the morning star,
And in high heaven its utter rapture sing,
Filling the universe with golden sound
Of love immortal, measureless, unbound !

“ How shall immortal love find mortal bliss,
Or measureless be bound in narrow speech,
Or free and forge the bondage of a kiss ?
Nay, but its end is ever out of reach,
Its life, of fairer life the chrysalis ;
And all its days, desirable and fleet,
But prints of unseen Beauty's passing feet.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

“ Ah ! Love is thine whose all-transfusing sun
Burns out the mystery of life and death ;
And all thine hours but blossom unto one
That us in utter bondage compasseth.
Now to that timeless hour Time's footsteps run
To rear our throne, whose foot shall never know
The chafe of life's eternal ebb and flow.

“ And he whose heart long time was scarred and swept
By hungering winds that robbed him of repose,
Wrapt in deep joy, beyond his joy has slept .
Into a passionless calm, that wakes and knows
Love's highest bliss in honour stainless kept.
Farewell, and when a little while has flown
I come again.” He ceased. She stood alone.

Far through the morn the horn of Eochaidh blew,
Outspeeding runners hot with glad return.
From post to post goes welcoming halloo :
Far off the shouldered spear-heads dance and burn
Through smother of wheels, and marching men that
strew
Their wake with dust and song, and storm at last
Round dun and liss, their prosperous journey past.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

And all that day go question and reply,
Twin bodkins looping up the stuff of life:
And all that dusk, warm cheek and glancing eye
Blow up love's ruddy peat in man and wife:
And all that night, harps throb and warpipes cry
Around the king, enthroned in joy complete,
Etain beside him, Ailill at his feet.

But through the songs of praise that round him swell,
One voice to him has music sweeter far.
Close to his heart she now the tale doth tell
Of duty done, and love escaped a scar;—
But not of that deep hour, unspeakable
With visitation from beyond the world,
Shut in her heart, a blossom closely curled.

On Eochaidh's royal brow sits glad content
That she, fate's minister to Ailill's pain,
Who dared in faith the perilous descent,
Now stands more white against averted stain.
And Ailill, all his heart in service spent,
Fills their glad hours with tender friendship's light
Sweet as the beam that silvers quiet night.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

VI

Now at life's wheel Etain the day-long sings;
Not loud, but low as one who musing waits
An hour, whose promise in her deep eye springs
In keen transfiguring light that contemplates
The mystery of small, familiar things
Made great with gleams from past the verge of sight,
And strange with rumours of the infinite.

In that bright realm glimpsed through the shade of this
She sees great peace resolve earth's little strife;
And deepening vision sounds a deeper bliss,
Till joy rolls round the fretted shores of life;
And in swift stroke of hate, and love's long kiss,
She marks one law work out one hidden Will,
And life and death one happy doom fulfil.

So pass her days in labour sped with peace.
And now the king, heart-eased in her repose,
Gathers warm love about him like a fleece;
And through the land his joy wide-circling goes,
Stirring swift hands that bid the earth increase
Her gift of good, till wealth and fatness throng
Their duns with praise, and fill their mouths with song.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

Life's labour widely shared the lightlier lies
Along the days; and when its tumults cease,
Free brain and limb are swift in rivalries
Upon the bloodless battlefields of peace
In thought's affray, or deed of strength whose prize
Scarce more adorneth him whose power prevails,
Than him who strongly dares and greatly fails.

And in long nights, when age and childhood sleep,
Bright eyes that flicker round the rushlit board
Mark how the chess-players, in silence deep,
Meet skill with skill, until delight is roared
At cunning scheme, or swift unreckoned leap:
But, cute as fox or quick as tern awing,
No hand is found to mate King Eochaidh's king.

Loudly his fame rolls through the echoing land;
But in his dreams, in some high tourney met,
He feels a strong inexorable hand
Counter his craft with calm unwavering threat
By an unseen far-seeing player planned,
That haunts his thoughts with hint of some deep strife
Waged vastly on the board of death and life.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

Then from his couch, with apprehensive eye,
Forth goes the king for solace. Mile on mile
His happy realms in dawn's pale radiance lie
Secure in his great strength ; so with a smile
He tramples out the night's thin troubling cry,
Then toward his palace turns, lo ! at its door
There stands a chieftain never seen before.

Straightly he stands, nor from his pride's full height
Bends he from neck to knee one purple fold ;
Nor dips his spear, nor casts his shield whose light
Glinting from snowy boss and bead of gold,
Strikes from the king some memory of the night,
So that his quickened eye is swift to trace
A touch of challenge in the stranger's face.

“ Welcome, O stranger ! and doubly were thy name
To me revealed.” “ Mider : to thee unknown.
No far-sung dun is mine, lineage or fame ;
Yet in my realm I keep a steadfast throne,
And for my pleasure play a subtle game
With pawn and puissant knight and watching queen.
Fame trumpets far thy skill : now be it seen.”

ETAIN THE BELOVED

On swift-set piece and jewelled chessboard break
Slant arrows from the scarcely risen sun.
Rank faces rank. "Play, king!" . . . "Not without stake
I play; nor bate the forfeit quickly won,—
Thine?" "Fifty steeds whose hooves shall Erin shake."
Then Eochaidh, lightly at light-seeming task,
"And mine," he smiled, "whatever thou shalt ask!"

Matchless in skill, King Eochaidh moves elate . . .
One moment . . . then . . . straight lip and slow-
drawn breath
Yield sullenly to sure on-coming fate.
Behind his eyes vast shapes of Life and Death
Move hand to hand. . . . Soon ends the struggle—"Mate!"
The stranger calls King Eochaidh's boast is gone!
"The stake?" he vaguely asks. . . . "Thy wife, Etain."

Now like a spider wrapped in his own snare,
The king turned to and fro to rend the spell
Of ghastly loss. Pride stricken to despair
Tugged at life's roof-tree. Round him ruining fell
Puffed hopes and brittle joys that broke in air;
And high desires, reined short in sight of goal,
Stumbled to earth and snapped life's chariot-pole.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

Then in that other's eye some glance revealed
Faint pity. . . "Nay, not this!" King Eochaidh cried.
Take thou the treasures won on hard-fought field,
Spoils of the furrow, tribute of the tide :
These for thy forfeit here I freely yield ;
Not her whose smile makes festive life's poor crust,
But lost would turn its glories into dust !"

The stranger calmly answered, "King, the bird
Poised on a little trick within the brain,
Soars sunward. Kings on honour's lightest word
Unshaken, rear a realm that shall remain.
Snaps a small string : lo ! all the song that stirred
With beauty and joy, sinks like storm-swallowed ships,
And bards unborn harp a high-king's eclipse.

"But fear not thou. Thy fame shall feel no wind
Of cold rebuke ; for when these shadows lift,
Thou in life's loss the Spirit's gain shalt find :
Thou to thyself shalt give thine utmost gift ;
And know thou only hast what is resigned.
I go—but come on one clear-omened day,
And thou shalt pay thy debt." He went away.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

In that same hour the hungry nestling's cheep
Floods Etain's drowsing ear with gentle woe.
Sleep stirred by waking, waking soothed by sleep,
Around her heart in linking eddies flow ;
Till at some passing wind that shakes the deep
Of dream, she wakes with eyes that strain to see
A haunting face behind life's mystery.

And in lone hours of many a moonless night,
Through jetting poplars and the shooting snags
Of wrinkled oaks, the king doth seek a light
From his heart's questionings, whose purpose flags
Before her face, lest in her eye's clear sight
One thought of faithlessness a moment read
Should bring to birth the thing he most doth dread.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

VII

Strong in the strength that finds in gentleness
A way to peace, King Eochaidh on the throne
Of Erin sits. Around his footstool press
High cares of sovereignty, that crowd his own
Like gossips out of doors, and ease the stress
Of storming thought which, held from question clear,
Fears its mute doubt, yet vaguely doubts its fear.

In silent step, hushed pulse, and listening gaze,
He marks expectancy behind her smile,
Like some faint gleam from half-remembered days
Ere the high Gods had blown them to this isle
Among inscrutable divided ways,
Some hidden destiny to mar or make
In hands as strong to give as quick to take.

Now to the king the hollow moments haste
Across his heart to some heart-emptied hour :
And now he frets to leap with sinews braced
Through lagging days and meet the threatening power.
Yet from his conflict, inner lips now taste
The mingled wine of sweet and bitter fate—
Strength to withstand, Endurance to await.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

These not as gifts the shadowy troublers bear,
But on his table spread what is his own.
So mused the king: "Not all from spade and share
The harvest comes: seed to its fruit has grown,
Self-shaped, though stirred by smart of sun and air;
And in life's myriad hands beaten and pressed,
Man is not made, but man made manifest."

So finding gain in threatened loss, his mind
Self-poised, through sorrow and joy makes even way,
Content if, toiling past, his fingers find
Her fingers, and in trembling silence say,
"Here in unstable circumstance entwined
We two have kissed, and whither we may tend,
Once mixed, must find each other at the end."

And she within her heart's most secret place
Has nursed a thought that grew from day to day,
Like wind-borne seed that on a rocky face
Finds root and strength to shatter ancient sway,
A thought of Love that chafes at time and space,
And moves from Love that was through Love to be
To some exalted end no eye can see.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

Yet nought of this was uttered each to each ;
But when, like forest monarchs strong and proud,
A silver birch beside a sinewy beech,
They stood at feast to hail the gathering crowd,
Swift winds of joy came full of happy speech,
And through the host light raptures laughed and
 played,
Witless of yellowing leaf or sodden shade.

Then came a day when on the bare flag-stone
The slow snail crawled ; the chestnut's candles turned
Downward as dead ; the wolf-hound with a groan
Gazed in King Eochaidh's eyes through eyes that burned
Great threat ; the spear-grass hither and thither blown
Bent on the sand and traced its rings awry,
And sun and moon slid sideways down the sky.

Swiftly to Eochaidh the dread omens tell
The day of forfeiture ; yet to Etain
No word he speaks. Her eyes so softly well
With wondrous beauty, all his heart is drawn
In love to hold her from the coming spell.
Pushed past its hour, the unspoken doom may break,
And love and honour stand without a shake.

ETAIN THE BELOVED

On windy gap and boggy mountain path
He sets his watchers. Knee-deep where the fists
Of bracken fronds are clenched in tiny wrath,
Stern guards now stand, and where in sculptured cists
Old kings are harvested in Death's long swathe.
Closed from alarm the shingled roofs now rise
Ringed through the dark with flaming searching eyes.

The word has passed, "The king shall have his whim:
No stranger looks upon the queen to-night."
Around the feasting board men great of limb
Shut fast each door, and blind the hope of sight
With shining shields that turn the torches dim.
Throned firm in strength defying power or guile,
He joys, and hopes—yet fears Etain's faint smile.

Now harp and song have touched their utmost height,
And fall in sudden silence at a sound
Deeper than sound, and pale before a light
Clearer than light. Above, beneath, around,
All heaven and earth are shaken with a might
Past might, swift chariots clash, and mixed with these,
Far thunderings and the roar of distant seas!

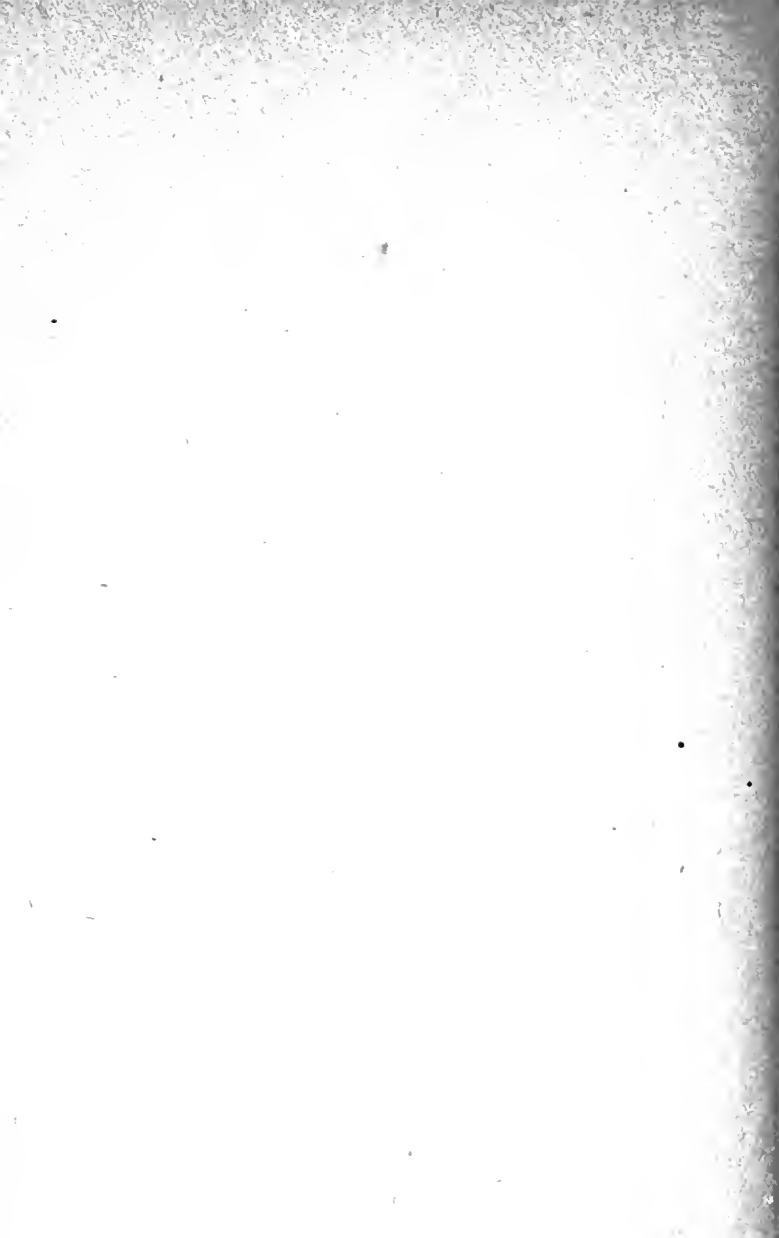
ETAIN THE BELOVED

And in their midst is Mider, a shining God
From whose majestic presence swiftly spreads
Peace not of earth. Before his face, unflawed
By shadow of taint, brave warriors bow their heads.
And now the king, snapping his silver rod
Of power, with sudden eyes made clear, with cheeks
Flamed by swift vision, through the silence speaks.

“Now have I seen the shining hand of Him
Who sifts the world for His divine desire;
And gathers, and within His quern’s wide rim
Grinds all things meet for His transforming fire,
And kneads them to a purpose far and dim;
Who fashions all things to His growing plan,
And breaks . . . and moulds . . . and breaks the heart
of man.

“Take Thou Thy will—so it be her’s? . . .” A hope
Shoots a faint arrow instantly—no more.
A blinding fire falls from night’s glimmering slope.
Flame-like the twain meet on the rushy floor—
And vanish. King and clansmen blindly grope
Into cool air. Across the sky two swans
Fly slowly toward the day that palely dawns.

POEMS AND LYRICS



DEATH AND LIFE

To the memory of Eveleen Nicolls

I

The long, dark slope is topped with mist,
But here the sun is on the grass :
Beneath, the sea-waves break, and twist
Backward like snakes of molten glass.

Across an ancient sand-heaped wall
The foot thro' graves forgotten goes,
And stops where old, old voices call
Thro' generations of repose.

But where a sorrow of to-day
Has set a freshly-fashioned mound,
A bird slides down his airy way
And makes the silence ring with sound.

DEATH AND LIFE

II

What gloom might now our spirits balk
Fades out before that high reproof;
And thro' the fabric of your talk
Go light and shadow, warp and woof,

With something deeper than the word,—
Some stately certitude of faith
Whose eye at Life had never blurred,
Nor quivered at the eye of Death,

But saw, in that swift, woman's way,
Thro' changings to the changeless Whole,
And Life and Death as waves that sway
Across the ocean of the Soul.

DEATH AND LIFE

III

Then when the hill was lost in mist,
And in the sea the sky was glassed,
We wandered home in amethyst ;
And you upon the morrow passed

On that last journey to the West
Whose end was in the Atlantic wave,
Where, on your youth's triumphant crest,
One stroke, another's life to save,

With glory crowned your life complete,
Proud as the horsed and pluméd seas
That laid your body at my feet—
A wonder past Praxiteles.

DEATH AND LIFE

IV

Oh! bear her by the weeping crest,
And past the fields of fallen ears,
On her last journey from the West,
This holy Lady Day of tears.

But yet, tho' heads are bared and bowed,
And down the road the keeners keen,
Some spirit-music, deep and proud,
Slips out their thin, shrill cries between

And, like the bird that other day,
That made the silence ring with sound,
It floats along the sun-set way,
A joy above our sorrow's mound.

DEATH AND LIFE

V

What grief might now our spirits balk
Fades out before that high reproof;
And thro' the hushed and wavering talk
That fills the streets from roof to roof,

A fire from your high altar shines,
And kindles thro' our dusk of strife
A faith whose inner eye divines
That Death is minister to Life,

And all our years a moment's dream
In one great Mind that grasps the whole,
And Life and Death but waves that gleam
Along the ocean of the Soul.

A SCHOOLBOY PLAYS CUCHULAIN

'Way there! for one who hastens forth
To guard the Marches of the North,
Where Connacht's hosts with flame and brand
Hurl menace toward his native land,
And Macha's Curse on arm and will
Hangs dreadfully from hill to hill.

'Way there! Four valorous feet of height,
Twelve long, long years of age and fight,
He fronts without a thought of fear
Ten thousand with his wooden spear.
Soon shall he fling the charging field
Back on his puissant pasteboard shield,
And soon shall haughty Maeve bend down
A vassal to his tinsel crown.

'Way there! Who laughs has hardly heard
A hidden trumpet's secret word,
Or glimpsed through those poor arms he bears
The weapons that the spirit wears.
In that wild breast a thousand years
Rise up from ineffectual tears,

A SCHOOLBOY PLAYS CUCHULAIN

And kindle once again the flame
Of Freedom at a burning name.

What if for him no flag unfurled
Should shake red battle on the world ;
On other fields, in other mood,
The ancient conflict is renewed,
And Michael and his warring clan
Tramp onward through the heart of man.
At Life's loud fires he shall anneal
A subtler blade than transient steel,
When Love, invincible in Faith,
Shall smile upon the face of Death,
And Will and Heart, as one, conspire
To dare the utmost of desire.
Then shall he, with his spirit's lance,
Unhorse cold Pride and Circumstance,
Shake Wrong's old strongholds to the ground,
And Right's victorious trumpet sound,
And light Earth's ramparts with the gleam
Of Ireland's unextinguished Dream
That burned in him who hastened forth
To guard the Marches of the North,
When Macha's Curse on arm and will
Hung dreadfully from hill to hill.

HOW THE MOUNTAINS CAME TO BE

A bird once came and said to me,
“Hear how the mountains came to be.
An angel from his crystal sphere
Fell to the earth. A chilly fear
Shot thro’ his wings from tip to tip,
For there was neither boat nor ship,
Mountain nor stream, nor maid nor man,
Far as the angel’s eye could scan;
Dead flatness far as he could see
Before the mountains came to be.
He stretched his wings to fly away,
But round his feet the oozy clay
Gripped fast, and held him to the ground.
He stretched and strove until a sound
Went thro’ him from he knew not where
And said, ‘The only way is prayer.’
He dropped his wings and raised his eyes,
And sent his soul into the skies.
He prayed and prayed, and as he prayed
A wind among his plumage played
And bore him upward toward his sphere.
Around his feet from far and near
There came a sound that seemed to say,

HOW THE MOUNTAINS CAME TO BE

'Pray on! pray on! we too would pray.
Thy prayer has touched the sleeping Powers:
Pray on, thy prayer shall yet be ours;
We too have wings that pine for flight,
We too have eyes that long for light.'
Upward he moved, and still his eyes
Were fastened on the distant skies,
And as he rose toward heaven dim
He drew the earth up after him.
About his feet the oozy clay
Gripped fast, but could not stop or stay
His course, till on his skyey stair
He paused beyond the need for prayer,
While from the air beneath, around,
There rose a tumult of glad sound.
The angel turned the sound to seek,
And lo! his foot was on a peak
That fell away to where the world
Lay like a painted flag unfurled
And shaken out from sea to sea,—
And thus the mountains came to be."
So said the bird, and what the masque
Of meaning hid, I meant to ask;
But off he flew before I knew—
And yet I think the tale is true
If one could only hear aright,
And see with something more than sight.

LOVE IN ABSENCE

Hills crowned with age,
And solemn seas,
Are full of sage
Philosophies.
Yet, lacking thee,
I am not wise :
I need thine eyes
That I may see!

Insect and bird
Chant prose and verse,
God's passion-stirred
Interpreters.
Howe'er I seek,
Their meaning slips:
I need thy lips
That they may speak !

Long days that shine,
Or richly weep ;
The dreamful mine
Of happy sleep,
Without thee, give
A slender part :
I need thy heart
That life may live !

LOVE IN ABSENCE

Hear then my cry,
And hasten, sweet !
The world and I
Are incomplete ;
Poor with all pelf ;
Bound most when freed :
Thy Self I need,
To be my Self !

TREES IN WINTER

Gaunt and spare,
The silly trees
Strip them bare
To winter's breeze ;

Yet when July
Sweltered red,
Dressed unduly
Heel to head !

Who will whisper
Unto me,
Why is this
Perversity ?

Bent his head
A stately beech :
Slowly said
In gentle speech :

“ Why, O man ! not
Find a moral
(Though you cannot
In the laurel,)

TREES IN WINTER

“ In our vigour
And our pelf,
Type and figure
Of yourself ?

“ Sun-kissed amity
Conceals
What calamity
Reveals :

“ Summer glozes
Stain and scar ;
Winter shows us
As we are.

“ Well if thou,
In trying hour,
Stand, or bow,
In naked power,

“ Like the spare
But sinewy trees
Standing bare
To winter's breeze !”

A SPRING CAPRICE BY
A ROBIN

Rubato

Who, on such a day of spring,
Would be careful how he sing?
Let the overflowing heart
Get a start,
Who shall care if no one knows
How to find a perfect close
To his strain,
When the brain—
Drunk with sun and hyacinth,
Primroses and bursting oak,
And the sower's puffs of smoke
Over fields of brown—
Stumbling down
A melodious labyrinth,
Somehow, nohow, finds a way out,
Has his say out—
And begins it all again,
Caring nothing how he sing
When the brain,
Wild with Spring,
Gives a start
To his mad, melodious, overflowing heart?

Kilcarberry, Wexford.

A SPRING RONDEL BY A
STARLING

I clink my castanet,
 And beat my little drum ;
 For spring at last has come,
And on my parapet
Of chestnut, gummy-wet,
 Where bees begin to hum,
I clink my castanet,
 And beat my little drum.

“ Spring goes,” you say, “suns set.”
 So be it! Why be glum ?
 Enough, the spring has come ;
And without fear or fret
I clink my castanet,
 And beat my little drum

THE FAIRY RING

Enfolded in the Fairy Ring
My loved one sleeping lies,
To simple souls a dreadful thing,
For half a hundred eyes
Peep out from where among the grass
Floats up a magic lay
To call the souls of all who pass,
To fairyland away.

But I who know her heart's desire,
Fear neither spell nor frown ;
For not till fire shall stifle fire,
Or water water drown,
Or love hate love, can any harm
In kindred hearts abide.
Oh ! she can combat charm with charm,
My elfin-hearted bride !

And ye, whose minds are set to win
Fame's leaf or fortune's prize !
Beware the spell that lurks within
The circle of her eyes ;
For she has power to blow like straws
Earth's baubles from the hand,
And call the souls of all who pause,
Away to fairyland.

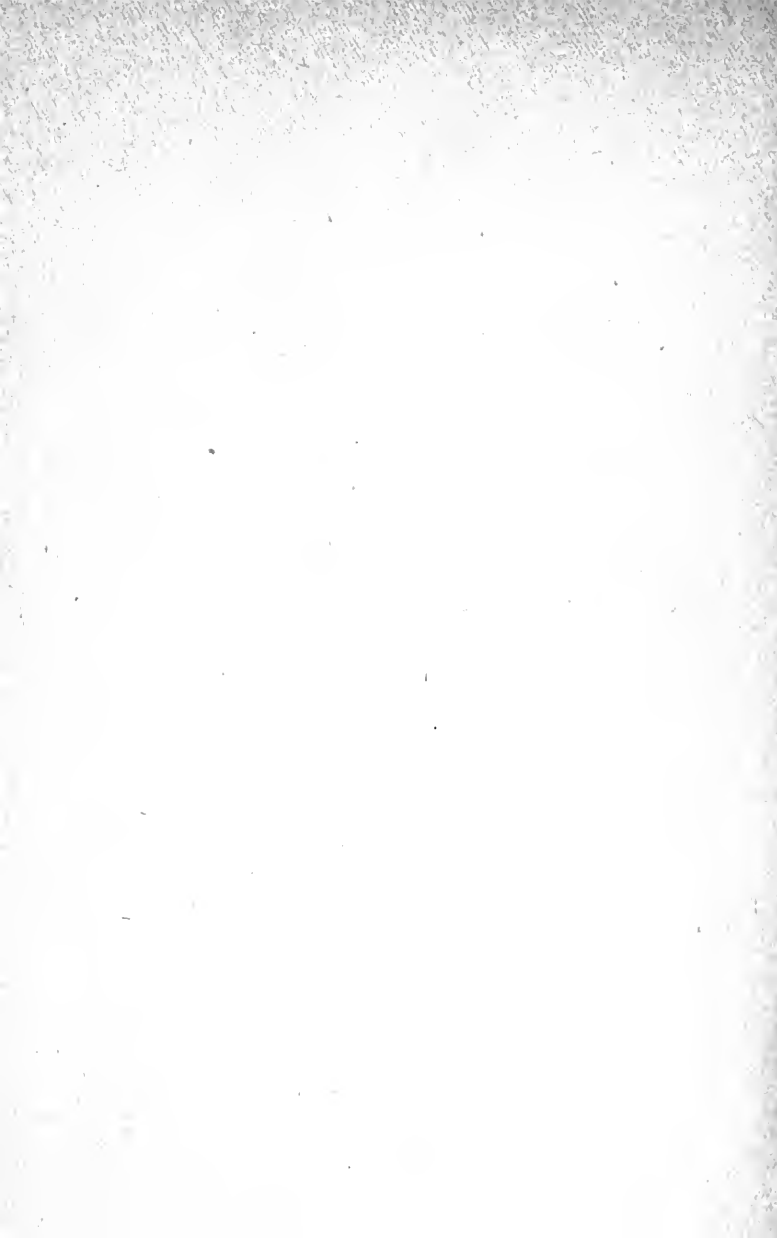
“LABORARE EST ORARE,”
A RONDEAU OF FIELD-LABOURERS

“To labour is to pray.” We heave
The heavy clay; we dig and cleave;
 And knees and hands deep in the sod,
 Search out and shape the Will of God
Creation’s purpose to achieve.

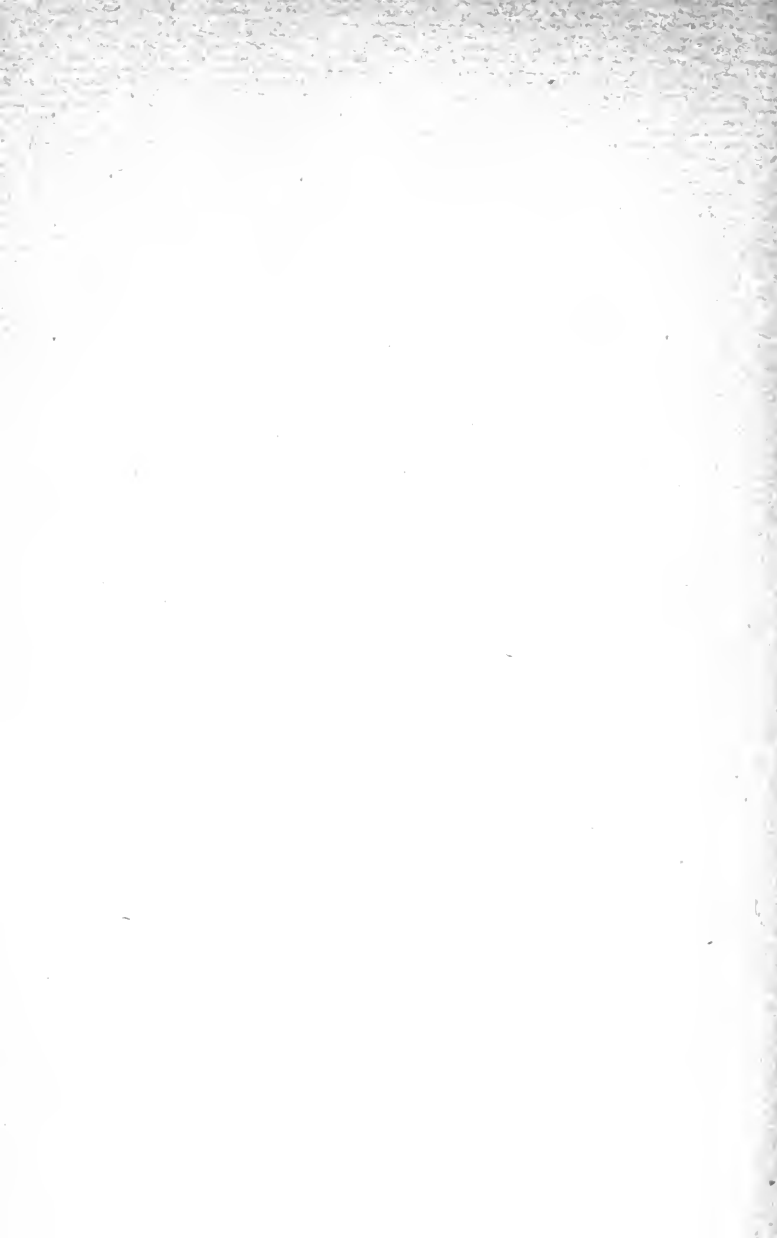
Slant showers may wound, sharp winds bereave—
We lift no soiled and suppliant sleeve:
 (Sure God and Mary bless the rod:)
 To labour is to pray.

And so we are content to leave
Prayers for long-headed folk to weave.
 We work His Will in ear and pod;
 And when His harvest-eyes applaud,
We know—what others but believe—
 To labour is to pray.

Ballymore, Donegal.



PARAPHRASES AND
INTERPRETATIONS



DAEDALUS AND ICARUS

The Builder of the Cretan Labyrinth and his Son

Quote Daedalus to Icarus :

“ With rule and plumbline,—thus, and—thus,
We space and build our labyrinth,
And build, besides, a graven plinth
To bear the future fame of Us,”

Quote Daedalus to Icarus.

Quoth Icarus to Daedalus :

Before these Cretans make a fuss,
And set our names up with a shout,
Perhaps we'd better first get out,
And show the master-mind of Us,”

Quoth Icarus to Daedalus.

Then round and round went Daedalus,
And out and in went Icarus.

They parted for an hour's whole space. . .

They met upon the selfsame place !

“ I think we're stuck,” quoth Icarus,

“ I think we are,” quoth Daedalus.

DAEDALUS AND ICARUS

In short, to be perspicuous,
Like this old tale of Daedalus ;
'Spite of our mouths with freedom filled,
From life's poor trivial things we build
A maze about the feet of us
That shuts us in like Daedalus.

But Daedalus and Icarus
Made wings, and set them—thus, and—thus ;
And that blind maze that hemmed them in
They sloughed, as drops the snake its skin :
And so at last shall all of us,
Like Daedalus and Icarus.

A PARAPHRASE

From the Prose of Jeremy Taylor

As the silk-worm, shut from sight,
Cuts a pathway into light;
Makes on mottled leaves repast
Till its wormy coat is cast;
Winds itself in silken weed;
Sheds the future's pearly seed;
Leaves behind its dower of silk,
And with wings as white as milk
Spread for flight, completes its span;
So evolves the soul of man.

HOSPITALITY

From the Irish, Seventh to Tenth Century

O king of stars that watch the night !
Whether my house be dark or bright,
Its door to none shall barréd be,
Lest Christ should close his house to me.

And if thy house shall hold a guest,
And aught from him thou hast suppressed,
Not all to him the wrong is done :
Thou hast concealed from Mary's Son.

THE STUDENT

From the Irish, Seventh to Tenth Century

High on my hedge of bush and tree
A blackbird sings his song to me,
And far above my linéd book
I hear the voice of wren and rook.

From the bush-top, in garb of grey,
The cuckoo calls the hours of day.
Right well do I—God send me good!—
Set down my thoughts within the wood.

AT A HOLY WELL

He dragged his knees from flag to flag,
And prayed for health with awe-struck brow,
Then hung his ill's discarded rag
On the o'erhanging hawthorn bough.

And in the adoring hush that fell,
I, from the form set inly free,
Knelt at my heart's most holy well
And worshipped mine own mystery.

Templemanaghan, Kerry.

THE PRIEST'S LAKE

Beneath the bridge, with noisy rout,
The Atlantic fills the quiet lake . . .
A pause . . . a turn then with a shout
Seaward the brimming waters break.

“Open thy gates,” the Spirit saith,
“O Soul! My wave thy shore shall sweep,
Then back across the pause of death
Draw thee with shoutings to the deep!”

Ardbear, Connemara.



SONNETS



A PAPER-SELLER

Clearly, and iterant as a swinging bell,
I heard across the surges of the Strand
A woman's voice, and saw a woman's hand
With "Votes for Women." A sudden vision fell
Across my path, and made my pulses swell
With agony of joy: I seemed to stand
At some far hill, from whence was faintly fanned
A whisper, "He descended into Hell."

Sister! with foot in gutter, foot on kerb,
Tasting humiliations's bitter herb
In thy great calm of self laid wholly down!
Thine are the thorns of Christly souls who bend
To lift the world; and thou too shalt ascend
To thine own Heaven and everlasting crown!

Strand, London.

TO ONE IN PRISON

Dear! on Love's altar thou hast laid thee down,
Priestess and Victim of such Sacrifice
As might melt praise from very hearts of ice,
But wins the scoff of sycophant and clown.
Yet in that band, whose glory is the frown
Of sceptred tyranny and stained device,
Thou hast a place; and thee it shall suffice
To tread with them the path to high renown.

And I—even I, unworthy though I be—
For these my wounds of utter loneliness,
Tired head and sleepless eyes, some part would claim
In the deep rubric of thy mystery ;
So may I, in proud years that rise to bless,
Stand in the shadow of thine honoured name.

Nov. 23—Dec. 23, 1910.

A HOME-COMING

What flags are these? . . . what trumpets? . . .

Oh! what drums?

What pride august? . . what solemn minstrelsy?

Hush! drums, ecstatic drums: say who is she

That in the midst majestically comes.

Is she some queen whose haughty eye benumbs

Proud potentates; whose word can lift the sea

Of shattering war, and fling red misery

Across the world? . . Speak, drums! Oh! aching
drums!

Hush! hush! wild drums, drums in my happy heart!

Not thus she comes, my life's exalted queen,

But in sweet silence far outlauding praise.

Her's not the flaming sword that puts apart,

But Right's resistless blade, whose stroke unseen

Wounds but to heal, and crown with Freedom's bays!

LOVE, THE DESTROYER

Come from behind those eyes, that I may see
Thyself, beloved! not lip, or hand, or brain.
These are not thou. These are the servile train
That crowd me from thine inmost mystery.
Show me thy naked soul! . . . or it may be
That, lacking this, I shall, in Love's mad strain,
Shatter the form, and sift it grain by grain
To find thine utter Self—thee—very Thee! . . .

Ah! Love, forgive! . . . Be this my penitence
That in my passion I have glimpsed the goal
Of all calamity, and surely scanned
In flood and flame, earthquake and pestilence,
Love raging forth, to find Love's inmost soul,
With bridal gifts in Ruin's awful hand!

ENVOY

THE LOVING CUP

I

*I raise to you, O Queen, this Loving Cup, this Mether,
Filled with Mead
Made from honey of the heather,
Brought by many a humming wing,
And with water from the spring;
Mixed by cunning hands together
In a foamy ferment
Thou would lead
Sullen tongues to song,
If along
Harpstrings now a rousing air went.*

II

*But in this our souls' espousal
Axe nor skeen
Throb and bleed
For the spear-clash of carousal,
Spoils of slaughter
Ravening :
No, for peace has mixed our mether,
With its Mead,*

THE LOVING CUP

O my Queen,
Made from honey of the heather,
And with water
From the spring.

III

Ah! but what avail
Song and ale,
If beneath our quaffing
Moves not something deeper than our laughing ?

IV

So to you, O Queen,
Here with hands unseen
I raise my Heart's deep Mether,
Where together,
Sweetness brought on Fancy's wing
From the flowers
Of happy hours,
And a draught from Thought's cool spring,
Blend in song's melodious ferment,
With an undertone
Caught in deeper hours alone,
When along Life's solemn harp the Spirit's air went.



NOTES

Etain the Beloved:—This poem is founded on an ancient Irish myth. It is not a translation from the Gaelic ; but rather is an attempt at transfiguration, by seeking to “unfold into light” the spiritual vision that was the inspiration, and is the secret of the persistence and resilience, of the Celt. Such modifications as I have made in the story have neither archæological nor philological significance : they arise entirely from whatever measure of insight into artistic necessity, on the side of pure literature, has been granted to me ; and also from obedience to a view of the universe which is embodied in the ancient Irish mythology, and whose operations the personages of the story body forth as Psyche bodied forth the soul of humanity to the Greek.

The names of the personages may be pronounced thus : Etain—Etawn’s Eochaidh—Yo’hee, Ailill—Al’yil, Mider—Mid’yir.

Dagda is the Irish God of Day, Balor the Irish God of Night.

A dun is a fortified dwelling, a liss is a place for domestic animals.

Death and Life:—On Friday, August 13, 1909, the author went by currach from Dunquin to the Great Blasket Island, Kerry, to visit Miss Eveleen Nicolls, M.A., who was spending a holiday on the island. Instead of joining her, as was intended, in music and conversation amongst the islanders, he had to participate in an endeavour, alas ! unsuccessful, to restore her to life. She had been bathing with a fisher-girl. The latter got into difficulties in the strong Atlantic current, and an effort by Miss Nicolls to save the girl ended in the heroic sacrifice of her own life.

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